

CHILD'S HISTORY
OF
WASECA COUNTY,
MINNESOTA.

*From Its First Settlement in 1854
to the Close of the Year 1904.
A Record of Fifty Years.*

THE STORY OF THE PIONEERS
By JAMES E. CHILD.

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*"Let me speak to the yet unknowing world
how these things came about."—Shakespeare.*

most shocking and horrible. The child's head was nearly severed from the body at one stroke of the knife. The woman received a severe gash across both shoulders and the throat—probably from one powerful blow. It was evident that Ruf drew the knife twice across his own throat.

Mr. Buser soon after returned to Wisconsin, taking the children with him. So far as known, Ruf had no relatives in this country.

"SIXTY-EIGHT DAYS IN A SNOW DRIFT AND STILL ALIVE."

An article with the above heading appeared in the Waseca News of March 19, 1873, and read as follows:

"Two fat hogs belonging to Wm. Bevans, of Byron, that were lost during the snow storm of Jan. 7th, last, were found alive and healthy on the 14th inst., in a snow drift adjoining a straw stack. Sixty-eight days under a snow drift and yet alive is doing pretty well. Messrs. Carmody and Covell, of Wilton, who are responsible for this information, remarked that it was the 'cheapest way in the world to winter hogs.'"

THE PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY.

This organization, which had been at work for several years among the farmers of the country, especially in the West, organized a county grange in Waseca, May 3, 1873. It was run on the narrow-gauge plan, but it nevertheless accomplished a great deal of good. The call for the meeting was signed "Wm. A. Erwin, secretary," by order of committee.

The temporary organization was effected by the election of I. D. Beaman, of Blooming Grove, temporary chairman; and W. D. Armstrong, temporary secretary. After the election of a committee on credentials and one on permanent organization, a recess was taken till afternoon.

At the afternoon session, the committee on credentials reported the following gentlemen entitled to seats: J. S. Abell, Joseph Minges, Adam Bishman, A. L. Warner, and Sam Leslie, of Pomona grange; C. E. Graham, S. Hydorn, D. D. Green, P. Vanderwarka, and C. Bates, of County Line grange; A. Keyes, S. C. L. Moore, and S. C. Dow, of Alma City grange; Hugh Wilson, R. F. Stevens, J. Turnacliff, Noah Lincoln, and Geo. H. Woodbury, of Wilton grange; Philo Woodruff, David Wood, M. Dewald, and J. R. Davidson, of Hazel Dale grange; I. D. Beaman, S. F. Wyman, Albert Remund, Patrick Haley, and Wm. Habein, of

3, 1873, after an illness of several months. He left a wife and two children.

Mrs. Michael Kinney, one of the pioneer women of Iosco, died February 8 and was buried February 10. Her funeral was very largely attended, the large Catholic church being entirely filled.

There was a very heavy snow storm February 26, so heavy that the roads and railroads were badly blockaded for two or three days.

John Toole, section foreman at Janesville, aged 64 years, was killed March 7, 1873, by being thrown from a hand-car by a freight train.

Nettie, four-year-old daughter of Mr. Alex. Brisbane, then of Wilton, was so badly scalded by falling upon a kettle containing boiled potatoes that she died March 9, after twenty-four hours of great suffering.

Henry Adolphus Trowbridge, highly respected son of Hon. I. C. Trowbridge, of Waseca, died April 20, 1873.

A daughter of Mr. and Mr. John Forest, then of Wilton, died April 22.

Mrs. Wm. Orcutt, of Freedom, after a severe illness, died April 23.

On June 3, Wm. Bluhm, a lad about fifteen years of age, son of Henry Bluhm, then of Meriden, accidentally shot himself while hunting in the woods. In drawing his gun over a log the gun was accidentally discharged, its contents striking him in the neck and throat. He died soon after.

A young child, aged one year and eight months, of Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Ballard, of St. Mary, fell into a pail of hot water on Saturday and was so badly scalded that it died on Sunday, July 5.

Albert M. Smith, of Waseca, son of J. B. Smith, died July 4, at the age of twenty-seven years, of consumption.

A child of Mr. D. A. Erwin, of St. Mary, two years old, met with a sad accident Sept. 29. It upset a dish of hot starch, prepared for ironing purposes, and was severely burned upon its breast, abdomen and legs. It lingered until October 8, when death came to its relief.

Samuel, son of Anthony Sampson, of New Richland, a boy about nine years of age, fell from a wagon, Oct. 10, 1873, and was so badly injured that he died within a few minutes after his fall.

marshes and streams filled with water and the whole surface of the country was pretty well wet down.

Speaking of the storms of July 1 and 2, a local paper said:

"Last week, Tuesday and Wednesday night, terrific rain storms visited a large portion of the state. In some places west of us the wind and hail entirely destroyed the small grain, and did much damage to other crops. In some parts of Nicollet county, buildings were blown down, and some cattle injured. In Blue Earth county, near the Waseca county line, west of Freedom, considerable damage was done. Mr. Gunzulus, of this county, had his granary blown down and his house partly unroofed. In Steele county, many buildings were torn in pieces, some persons injured, and some cattle killed. At Vassa, Goodhue county, dwellings were torn in pieces, seven persons killed outright, and thirty others more or less injured. News comes from all portions of the state of local tornadoes doing more or less damage. In this county, with the exception of a small tract in Freedom, no serious damage was done to the crops. The rainfall was very heavy, probably as heavy as in other portions of the state, and there were local dashes of hail, but the wind, with the exception noted in Freedom, was not heavy."

FOURTH OF JULY.

The Catholic society of Waseca held a picnic for the benefit of their church—the net receipts being \$200. New Richland held a formal celebration, Hon. William Brisbane and Hon. M. D. L. Colleston being the orators of the day. Blooming Grove did herself proud, as usual, Rev. William Pagenhart and James E. Child being the speakers. The Erwin family and neighbors, in St. Mary, observed the day in a formal manner—the venerable P. A. Erwin, then eighty-two years of age, presiding. The ladies furnished a most appetizing dinner and all fared sumptuously.

HORSE THIEF AND HIS REVOLVER.

On July 16, 1879, Mr. Finger Fingerson, of Blooming Grove, had a horse stolen, and on Thursday a man, giving his name as Frank Carr, stopped at Esquire Northrup's on the road between Waterville and Morristown, to borrow a saddle. Mr. Northrup being suspicious of him, questioned him pretty closely, and finally concluded that he had stolen a horse, and ordered his arrest by three or four men who were there. Mr. Carr took to his legs and ran toward Morristown; but Messrs. Brooks and Purrington, with a horse and buggy, soon overtook him. Then the thief

CHAPTER XLVIII.

WASECA COUNTY HORSETHIEF DETECTIVES.

This mutual protection organization is one of the oldest in the state, having been organized in 1864. In every sparsely settled farming community, horse stealing is almost a profession. The summer of 1862 revealed the fact that we had in our midst a gang of horsethieves. In the month of June, Orrin Pease, who had just settled in the town of St. Mary, had a pair of fine horses stolen. After considerable search by Sheriff Whipple and others, the horses were found in the possession of three men named Erno, Beatty, and a colored person called Anderson, all three of whom were convicted of larceny, but, pending an appeal to the supreme court, broke jail at Wilton and made their escape. The stealing of these horses, the escape of the thieves, and the expense attending their arrest and trial, created a strong feeling of indignation on the part of our people against thieves in general and against horsethieves in particular, and was the primary cause of the organization of the Waseca County Horsethief Detective Society that still exists. The names of the Pioneers who brought forth this organization are as follows:

| | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|------------------|
| W. L. Wheeler, | Eri G. Wood, | Henry Watkins, |
| Asa G. Sutlief, | M. S. Gove, M. D., | Myron Blackburn, |
| Wm. Brisbane, | Eugene A. Smith, | J. K. Myers, |
| Geo. E. Brubaker, | W. H. Young, Sr., | Q. A. Heath, |
| Noah Lincoln, | Joseph Bird, | Wm. Roddle, |
| B. A. Lowell, | D. L. Whipple, | James E. Child. |

The minutes of the first few meetings will be of interest. The first, or preliminary, meeting was held at Wilton, in the court room, February 16, 1864. The minutes read as follows:

down. At the station, a blacksmith shop was torn down, and the flouring mill was unroofed and otherwise seriously damaged.

The damage throughout the towns named was very extensive, and few there were who did not suffer some loss.

RESULT OF THE ELECTION.

A. Bierman, democrat, for governor, carried the county by a majority of 203. For other state officers, the republican majority was about 165. The democrats elected Charles McKenna treasurer, M. B. Keeley clerk of court, P. McGovern county attorney, and Dr. D. S. Cummings superintendent of schools. Hiram A. Mosher, independent, was elected register of deeds. The republicans elected S. D. Crump judge of probate, B. A. Lowell court commissioner, Orson L. Smith surveyor, and Dr. H. J. Young coroner. The democrats also elected two county commissioners—M. F. Connor and A. J. Jordan.

VERMONTERS.

The Vermonters held a meeting at the Grant house in December, 1883, and Mr. P. A. Erwin, of St. Mary, was present, although eighty-eight years of age.

WILTON LODGE NO. 24.

The first Masonic lodge organized in the county was located in Wilton, and was instituted Jan. 8, 1858. After the removal of the county seat from that place to Waseca, Wilton gradually faded away, and on Dec. 20, 1883, the lodge was removed to Alma City. At the time of its location at Alma City it contained a membership of twenty-five. Its membership was soon after much increased.

CHAPTER LVIII, 1889.

DIED WITHIN THE YEAR, E. K. CARLTON, P. A. ERWIN, SAM KIRSTE, MAJ. W. C. YOUNG, NATHAN WOOD, MRS. McDONOUGH, WM. BEVANS, SAM MANTHE—COUNTY GOVERNMENT—ROAD AND BRIDGE APPROPRIATIONS—TAKEN TO PRISON, FRANK CONWAY OF ELYSIAN.

With the opening of the year came death and sorrow as well as mirth and happiness. Mr. E. K. Carlton, of Woodville, well known to older residents, died Jan. 1, 1889. He was born in Otsego county, New York, Feb. 5, 1811; was married to Miss Mary Curdick, July 31, 1842, at Hornellsville, New York. Soon after he removed to Wisconsin and settled in Dodge county. In 1854 he sold his farm there, and the following summer came to Minnesota and settled on East Prairie in Rice county. He soon sold out there and came to section five in Woodville in June, 1856. He remained on this farm until the fall of 1877, when he sold it. Thereafter he resided in various places in the state, but finally returned in 1881, to this county. Mary, his wife, died July 27, 1879. Mr. Carlton left a twin brother and three children to mourn his death.

That old veteran, Mr. Prudin A. Erwin, of St. Mary, peacefully breathed his last on Wednesday morning, Jan. 2, 1889, about 8 o'clock. Mr. Erwin was born in Fairhaven, Rutland county, Vermont, Oct. 16, 1797. In 1802 he was taken with his father's family to the wilderness of Franklin county, New York. He enlisted in the last war with Great Britain, in 1813, and served in the United States army until the close of the war. He continued to reside in Franklin county until 1863, when he came to

Minnesota, and opened a farm in St. Mary. His wife died in 1867. Mr. Erwin was a most excellent citizen and a kind neighbor. His death was as peaceful and quiet as if he were going to sleep. He will long be remembered by those who knew him for he was one of God's noblemen.

COUNTY GOVERNMENT.

The county commissioners met this year in annual session Jan. 1, the members being Messrs. Peterson, Sunde, Conway, Purcell, Deyling, and Buck. Mr. Peterson was elected chairman. The county printing was divided among three papers—the Herald got the tax list; the Radical, the financial statement; and the Argus, the proceedings of the board. Nothing more than the ordinary routine business transpired at the January session.

At the March meeting nothing more than ordinary transpired. At the May meeting the following appropriations were made:

One hundred and fifty dollars was appropriated to build a road on the town line between St. Mary and Woodville, to be expended under the supervision of Commissioners Remund and Peterson; \$75.00 was appropriated to build a new bridge between sections 22 and 27, St. Mary, to be expended under the supervision of J. Conway; \$100.00 was appropriated to grade approaches to the Markham bridge, and to grade slough on section 5, Alton, to be expended under the supervision of Commissioners Conway and Buck; \$250.00 was appropriated for roads and bridges in the First district, to be expended under the supervision of J. O. Sunde; \$250.00 was appropriated for roads and bridges in the Second district, to be expended on roads outside the city of Waseca, under the supervision of O. Peterson; \$250.00 was appropriated for roads and bridges in the third district, to be expended under the supervision of A. Remund; \$250.00 was appropriated for roads and bridges in the Fourth district, to be expended under the supervision of J. Conway; \$250.00 was appropriated for roads and bridges in the Fifth district, to be expended under the supervision of H. M. Buck.

A SAD RECORD.

The following appeared in a Waseca local paper, August 2, 1889:

Frank Conway, of LeSueur county, many years ago convicted of stealing a pair of H. A. Wagoner's horses, was again arrested last week, and will be taken to Stillwater next Monday afternoon, by the sheriff of this county, to serve out the remainder of his term of five years—four years and nine months, we hear. After his conviction of this horse-stealing crime, he obtained bail, after being in Stillwater some three

of business for most of the people of Freedom and a portion of the people of Alton. It has a thriving school and a successful creamery.

WOODVILLE.

Township No. 107 north, of range 22 west, was named after one of its earliest settlers (Mr. Eri G. Wood) by resolution of the county commissioners, April 5, 1858. Long before any white man ever viewed the rich hunting grounds of this county the native Indians must have made the town of Woodville one of their principal villages. There can be no doubt, in view of the Indian mounds and other relics which have been found upon the shores and in the vicinity of Watkins lake, that the Sioux Indians, for many generations, lived in large numbers in this township. Geographically it held a commanding position for the red man. From Clear lake he could, with his canoe, descend Crane creek to Straight river, thence to the Cannon river, and on to the Mississippi; or he could drag his light boat across the narrow strip of land that divides Clear lake from Gaiter lake, and there launch it for a journey down McDougall creek, thence down the Le Sueur river to the Blue Earth and the Minnesota rivers, and thus easily traverse vast sections of country abounding in fish and game. Later residents may doubt this view of the primitive situation, on account of late dry seasons, but the older settlers of this region remember well when small boats were run and could be run as here stated.

The splendid forests which then existed in portions of Woodville, Blooming Grove, Deerfield, and Meriden, not only afforded comfortable shelter from the freezing blasts of winter, but they furnished plenty of fuel and material for Indian wigwams. The woods abounded in game and the lakes were filled with the very choicest fish. Barring the sometimes intense cold of winter, it was the ideal land of milk and honey for the native tribes. It is no less a land of plenty for the white men that now possess it.

The surface is beautifully diversified—gently undulating, as a rule—rich prairies interspersed with timber, lovely lakes, bordered with groves of heavy timber—the groves being adorned in spring with blossoming plum trees, cherry trees, thorn and crab apple trees, and other flowering shrubs and trees in great profusion. Of the 23,040 acres of land in the township, over 2,000

and a nail, thus making a grater. Then each evening we would grate meal enough to do for the next day.

My first experience with wheat raising was not very flattering. I sowed six bushels of club wheat in the spring. The next fall we cleaned a spot near the stack, and when the ground was frozen we went at it with a flail. After two or three days we got it threshed. We had no fanning mills then, so we waited until the wind blew and then cleaned our immense crop. I had just six bushels of very smutty wheat. I took it to mill and had it ground. When I got home the good wife was overjoyed with the prospects of some good biscuits; but disappointment is the lot of man and, in this case, of woman; for when the biscuits were baked they were as black as the ace of spades, with smut, and we had to fall back on corn cakes and mush.

Well the next year the wheat was a great deal better and more to the acre. Besides, Christie Hefferon and I hit upon a new way of threshing—we trod out the wheat with oxen.

Some people complain that wheat is cheap now, but in 1859-60, we used to haul wheat thirty miles, to Faribault, and sell it for forty cents a bushel; if we hauled it to Hastings—sixty-five miles—we used to get from fifty-five to sixty cents a bushel. It took us from five to six days to make the Hastings trip with oxen. We were compelled to sleep under our wagons nights, and sometimes it rained or snowed on us. Times may be hard now for the 'tender-footed,' but they are not what they 'used to was' by several dollars to us in hand paid."

MR. ISAAC BALLARD

was born in North Hamptonshire, Eng., eighty-five miles from London, Dec. 14, 1834. He came to America in 1857, and stopped in Pennsylvania one summer. He came to Minnesota in the fall of 1857, and boarded with Mr. Chas. Billings, of Iosco, who had been here one year. He made a claim adjoining Mr. Billings' place. Mr. Wm. Taylor, his half brother, came about the same time, and settled on a farm in Blooming Grove.

Mr. Ballard had no property whatever to commence with. His first investment was changing work with a Mr. Churchill for a pig, and also with old Uncle Brossard for a calf. He was compelled to keep bachelor's hall. By working out a little here and a little there he was soon able to buy a pair of three-year-old steers from Enoch Roe, of St. Mary, paying therefor \$45. He was obliged to change works to get some breaking done. After this he raised a crop of wheat, part of which he traded for a wagon. Some of his first crop of wheat he hauled to Wilton, and sold it for twenty-five cents a bushel in store pay. He remembers that the first good bargain he ever made was when he sold two chickens to two Indians for twenty-five cents each. He says he never felt so rich before in his life. The Winnebago Indians were near neighbors and frequent visitors in those days. He married Catharine Erwin, Oct. 7, 1865. His first investment in land was sixty acres, which he thoroughly improved.

His nearest cash market was Hastings or Redwing. After a few years he was enabled to buy one hundred and sixty acres more, and he afterwards added another eighty to his large farm. A few years ago he sold a half section of his land, and retained only eighty acres, upon which he now resides.

He enlisted in Company C., First Minnesota infantry, as a recruit, and served during a portion of the war.

Mr. and Mrs. Ballard have seven children—Carrie, Arthur, Clifton, Walter Isaac, Marshall, Eugene, and Maud. Mr. Ballard is one of our best and wealthiest farmers, and has a comfortable home in which to spend his declining years. Mrs. Ballard is a refined and worthy woman, a sister of Mr. D. A. Erwin, of St. Mary.

MR. WILLIAM M. GRAY.

Among the Blooming Grove settlers who faced the storms and blizzards and exposures and hardships of 1855, was William M. Gray, one of the earliest settlers, who was born in Genesee county, New York. He was married in his native state to Miss Lucina Fuller. They came West at an early day and settled first in Illinois, then came to Iowa, where they tarried two years, and finally came to Blooming Grove, in the early summer of 1855, where they spent the remainder of their lives. The last days of December, 1855, Mr. Gray, in company with Simeon Smith, J. M. Bliven and Daniel Riegle started for West Union, Iowa, to obtain a supply of provisions. They found the roads blocked with snow, the weather being intensely cold, and they made slow progress. They had horse teams, but even with those they were long on the road. Miss Jane Gray, now Mrs. O. Powell, came back with her father from Iowa, on that trip. Messrs. Blivens and Riegle did not return at that time with the others. Messrs. Gray and two Mankato men encountered rough weather and bad roads on their return, and between the Vaughn settlement and Owatonna they got caught out and had to remain in a grove or thicket over night. They built a fire and managed to keep from perishing, but Mrs. Powell frosted her feet and suffered much from the cold. They had nothing to eat except flour wet with snow water and baked before the campfire on the end board of the wagon box. When Mr. Gray got back as far as Mr. Hatch's place, he left his daughter and his load and went home on foot to get oxen to haul the load the rest of the way, the horses being nearly tired out. The family had eaten the last potatoes the day the father reached home. Mr. and Mrs. W. M. Gray reared a family of nine children, one of whom, Melissa, died at the age of twelve years. Mr. Gray died in 1872, of dropsy, aged sixty-four years. Mrs. Gray died some years after, aged seventy.

WILLIAM HENRY GRAY

known as Henry, was born July 22, 1840, in the state of Illinois. He came to Minnesota with his father and participated in all the labor and

Mr. Brossard was a very successful farmer. He sold his farm here some years ago and removed to the state of Washington, where he and his family now reside.

THE ERWINS.

Mr. P. A. Erwin was one of the aged men that came to Waseca county at an early period in its history. P. A. Erwin was born in the Green Mountain State, in 1797, and served his country as a soldier in the War of 1812-15 with Great Britain. His wife, Jane Erwin, was born in Ireland. She was a sister of Rev. James Erwin who was quite a noted Methodist minister in Northern New York about 1833. P. A. Erwin and his family settled in St. Mary about 1863. Mrs. Jane Erwin passed to the Great Beyond in September, 1867. Her husband lived to the age of ninety-two, when he, too, joined the silent dead, honored and respected by all who knew him.

D. A. Erwin, son of P. A., was born in the state of New York, Aug. 4, 1839. In September, 1862, he enlisted in Company D, Ninety-eighth New York infantry, and served until May 1863, when he was honorably discharged for disability. He remained in the state of New York until 1864, when he came to this county and joined his parents in St. Mary. In 1866, in company with D. T. Ballard and others, he made a trip to Montana with ox teams in search of gold. After three years of unsatisfactory toil in Montana, he returned to this county where he has since made his home. He married Miss Orrilla Ketchum, daughter of Rev. Alvin Ketchum, deceased, Sept. 15, 1870. Mrs. Erwin is one of the pioneer girls of Minnesota, having come with her parents in 1856. They are the parents of nine children: Sidney, born Sept. 15, 1871, died Oct. 11, 1873; Claude, born March 26, 1873; Stanley, May 1, 1875; Grant, April 26, 1877; Roland, Jan. 27, 1879; Eugene, Jan. 17, 1882; Ray, Nov. 29, 1886; Ruth and Ruby (twins,) born Oct. 7, 1890. Ruth died March 13, 1900. The Erwins are of Revolutionary stock. D. A. Erwin's grandfather, David, who was born at Castleton, N. J., 1758, was four years in the Revolutionary War as a private; in the War of 1812 he was captain of a company and served until the close of the contest with Great Britain. His father, P. A., served in the War of 1812, and participated in the battle of Plattsburg, Sept. 11, 1814, where the British under General Prevost and Admiral Downie, were defeated by the Americans under Gen. Macomb and Admiral McDonough.

MR. JULIUS PAPKE,

now a retired farmer, was born in Prussia and came to America in 1861 with his family. He married Miss Eliza Buscho in Prussia, February 15, 1857. They first lived in Wisconsin, remaining there until 1865, when they located on section 26, St. Mary. Mr. Papke and wife were good farmers and accumulated a handsome property. They have been the parents of eleven children: Adolph, Melia, Augusta, Fred, John, Julius Jr., Sarah, Mary, Edward, Lewis and Elia. Adolph became a prominent far-